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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000245

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HQSOUTCOM ALSO FOR POLAD
DEPARTMENT FOR AID/OTI (RPORTER)

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: ROSALES CALLS FOR UNITED FRONT AGAINST
CHAVEZ/PRIMERO JUSTICIA SPLITS

REF: A. CARACAS 00201
[1](#)B. CARACAS 00219

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Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR DANIEL LAWTON,
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Zulia Governor and de facto opposition leader Manuel Rosales tried to rally opposition to President Chavez and recapture some of his lost momentum in a combative February 1 speech in Caracas. Rosales said that his Un Nuevo Tiempo (UNT) would unite with several other mainstream opposition parties on a common, but as yet unspecified, democratic platform. He stressed that the opposition needs to rebuild long-term at the local level and counter Chavez' radical plan of government with practical alternatives. Highlighting the opposition's continuing woes (Ref A), Primero Justicia formally split into two factions on February 2 after months of internal division. PJ dissidents, including Chacao Mayor Leopoldo Lopez, are forming their own political grouping while simultaneously considering joining Rosales' UNT party. End Summary.

Rosales: "30,000 Fronts in the Citizens' Struggle"

[1](#)2. (SBU) Zulia Governor and former presidential candidate Manuel Rosales spoke to 1500 persons at a Caracas hotel February 1 in an effort to rally and keep the political opposition to President Chavez united. Rosales announced a common platform and long-term strategy designed to unite his Un Nuevo Tiempo (UNT) party with both factions of Primero Justicia, the Christian Democrats (COPEI), as well as the small left-wing parties Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), La Causa R, and the Bandera Roja. Rosales stressed in his 43-minute speech that the opposition hopes to open "30,000 fronts" at the local level to defend freedom of expression, public services, decentralization of power, and the education system from politicization. He said the opposition would compete for positions on community councils. Attacking Chavez' new slogan for his "socialist" plan of government, Rosales proposed his own "five motors" for Venezuelans: employment, housing, public security, health, and social security.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Rosales sharply criticized the Enabling Law (Ref B) arguing that Venezuelans either have to oppose the concentration of executive power or be prepared to attend "the coronation of Hugo I." He urged young Venezuelans not

to emigrate, but to stay to fight for democracy in Venezuela.

While noting that he is not philosophically opposed to "nationalization," Rosales criticized the cost of the BRV's planned expropriations of CANTV and the electricity sector. He said the BRV's motivation for taking control of CANTV is to control the phone systems, a good part of the internet, and the transmission of electoral data. He also expressed solidarity with the employees of the independent RCTV network that Chavez has threatened to close this Spring and said people have to "rebel" against RCTV's closure.

14. (C) Rosales stressed the need for opposition unity, but he did not release any consensus documents as they are still being considered and negotiated across party lines. Primero Justicia (PJ) activist Carlos Ocariz told poloff February 1 that PJ will support Rosales' efforts to lead a confederation of leading opposition parties, but would not support the formation of an organization like the Coordinadora Democratica that led the unsuccessful recall effort against Chavez in 2004. Instead, Ocariz said the opposition parties that support Rosales will retain their identities and make independent proposals. They will vie separately for seats on local community councils. At the same time, they will coordinate on political projects so as to "complement, instead of compete" with each other.

Primero Justicia Splits

15. (SBU) A number of prominent Primero Justicia leaders, including Chacao Mayor Leopoldo Lopez, Liliana Hernandez, and Gerardo Blyde, formally left the party February 2. These leaders broke publicly with PJ leader Julio Borges during the presidential campaign in fall 2006 and had been planning to form a new political grouping for some time (Ref B). The former PJ dissidents are also reportedly considering joining

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Rosales' Un Nuevo Tiempo party, but have not yet done so. Addressing the media and supporters, Lopez accused PJ leader Borges of violating democratic norms in organizing PJ's own internal elections for February 4 and said the PJ dissidents would endeavor to build a more inclusive political party.

16. (SBU) Rosales managed to work with both PJ factions during the campaign, and both PJ wings have pledged to cooperate with Rosales' efforts to continue to unite the mainstream opposition parties. While the media refers to the break-away PJ faction as Justicia Popular, the group has not formally registered as a party yet. Lopez told the media February 4 that they are constructing a movement for "Social Democracy in Venezuela." Meanwhile, in their comments to local media, mainstream PJ leaders Borges and Carlos Ocariz expressed satisfaction with the participation of PJ members in the February 3 internal party polls.

Comment

17. (C) Rosales delivered a solid, hard-hitting message that Chavez is undermining democracy in Venezuela. He also recognizes that the opposition still has a real opportunity to compete with Chavez' supporters once Chavez implements the expansion of community councils. Rosales remains the best positioned opposition politician to fight an old-fashioned political fight over the long-term, so long as Chavez does not craft community council rules so as to exclude opposition participation at that level. Chavez has been very vague so far about how he intends to "empower" community councils (the "fifth motor of the revolution"); the devil will be in the details.

18. (C) Rosales' speech is also widely perceived as overdue and was overshadowed by the press conference Chavez called at

the same time to sign the Enabling Law. Chavez has dominated the political arena since his re-election in December 2006 with a series of sweeping announcements related to imposing the "socialist" phase of his "Bolivarian revolution." Rosales and other opposition figures took extended post-election vacations and have been slow to respond and still slower to agree on common principles that unite them. Moreover, the opposition's efforts to expose Chavez' authoritarianism are not helped by Primero Justicia's fissure over very public allegations of the lack of internal party democracy. Meanwhile, the Accion Democratica (AD) party still refuses to support Rosales' efforts and continues to fight the last war. AD launched a statistical analysis February 5 to "prove" the BRV committed fraud in the last presidential election.

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